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COUNTY ADMINISTRATION OF SCHOOL AFFAIRS IN ITS RELATION TO THE STATE DEPARTMENT

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Second to no other question of government is that of the administration of public education. While we of America so justly boast of our accomplishments in that line, may we not well pause to inquire if much of our extreme elation is not open to serious question? While there is no cause for pessimism there does seem to be every cause for serious facing of the facts. In 1910¹ there were in the United States more than five and one-half million persons over ten years of age who could not read or write. This means seventy-seven out of each thousand of our people illiterate. It is quite true that this number is made somewhat larger than would otherwise appear, by the incoming immigration and the presence of the negro. But these classes are with us, and the realization of that seeming excuse does not lessen the largeness of our problem. It should be noted that while 67 of each 1,000 of our children of native parents are illiterate, that only sixteen native white children of foreign parents are in that class. And aside from illiteracy, we must not be content unless education is leading our people well up toward the limit of their possibilities as individuals and as members of a great cosmopolitan state.

Universality and Unity of the Educational Problem

Nor should the good of the individual be alone considered, for more and more should we feel the importance of education as a nationalizing force. A realization of this vital fact calls for a universal interest in the solution of any and every educational problem; each should be an item of more than local interest. True the city has its particular system and plans within that system; the rural region is working on its problems; but each is of importance to the other. Especially must the city be concerned with what the rural region is to be. Peculiarly is the city dependent on the country; prolonged

¹ Russell Sage Foundation. *A Comparative Study of Public School Systems.*

prosperity in the city is impossible without a prosperous rural and small village community to supply its needs. And what the rural region is to mean to the city depends upon the intelligence of the rural people. An intelligent gardener, horticulturist, farmer, stock man is a greater producer than his ignorant neighbor; he contributes a larger food and a better food to the city buyer; he himself is a larger buyer and a better buyer of what the city has to sell. Each new invention of transportation or communication breaks down the city limit, tramples to the ground the hedges once surrounding the small community—city and rural region are merged into one great living thing.

Free School Idea and Its Expansion

The wisdom of the free school idea so largely accepted in this day we assume without question. But more and more must the idea be extended—extended commensurate with the changed conditions and unified relations. As the free school idea originally assumed the right to tax the one for the education of his neighbor's child just so now is distance obliterated and the neighbor may not be so near as the adjoining block or farm; he may be in the other end of the township, in the other side of the county, in distant part of the state, but yet within the system. Enlarged relations demand enlarged units of consideration as to educational taxation and administration. While education must come close down to the child, the expenses for education must not be a local matter. The child educated is more than liable to give his life work to another community, to the city perhaps, and not to the locality that might otherwise be called on to meet the cost of his education.

Needs of the Educational Work

Then, while accepting the free school idea and agreeing that we should not be content with less than the very best, examination shows that our schools have far from reached desired ground; having accomplished much for the American youth, they yet can accomplish more. A close analysis discovers that they are weak especially in these particulars: the terms are too short; teachers are poorly paid, hence, poorly trained; too many children of school age are not enrolled; per cent of attendance on enrolment is too small; schools are poorly graded; marked inequalities are evident. Six

states have their schools open less than six months of the year and one but five. Thousands of rural teachers are paid less than \$150 per year. One New England state pays less than six dollars per week to hundreds of teachers. The average yearly wage is less than \$500. Carpenters, coal miners, factory workers, common laborers receive more. Teachers cannot be well prepared and stay with the work under such conditions; schools lose the best. Several states have fewer than two-thirds of their children enrolled in schools of any kind; under proper organization they could have more, for three states at least have more than ninety per cent in school. Taking the whole country over, the school year taken advantage of by every pupil of school age would be equivalent to little more than four months, and for nearly one-fourth the states it would be less than three. Many schools stand entirely ungraded, no unity of action, even though transfers of pupils from one district to another may be common, each school is too often a rule and a law unto itself. Thus it can be seen that the schools are falling far short of desired efficiency, often discouragingly short, falling short while surrounded by most powerful forces for our nation's future if they be developed, forces latent in those boys and girls that are not getting their fair share of what the state should give. There is too much inequality. We should not and must not be content until we see the poorest schools of the future equal to the best of to-day. And how bring about that desired condition?

What Would "Big Business" Do?

Doubtless many forces may be made to work together to correct deficiency, but we shall within the scope of this short paper look to the one that seems to promise most. Let us look at it through seeing what business, especially "big business," does under similar circumstances. Business everywhere, when well organized, considers, not its capital, but the men in direct control, as its most vital asset. An examination of the great "trusts" that have arisen in these late years, arisen to succeed and stand or to fail and fall, shows that each did so largely in proportion to the caliber of the men in charge. Other items come in to influence, certainly, but, failing of a forceful head, large general success does not come. Not retrenchment but efficiency is the watchword, and business with increased remuneration more than commensurate is the result.

Parallel in Education

And so must education do; so must we respond to the educational need,—for here also is “big business.” Think of it (county and city considered):² New York with \$198,000,000 invested in school plant; Illinois, \$88,000,000; Massachusetts, \$72,000,000; Missouri, \$38,000,000; California, \$45,000,000; in the Southern States, from \$2,500,000 to \$23,000,000; a total for the nation of more than one billion dollars. In addition to this investment in plant, public education in the United States receives more than one-third of a billion dollars for yearly maintenance of the work. Other business seems to sink into insignificance when compared with this really “big business.” Education reaches, or should reach, in its influence every individual, which no other business does. Should it not have the most efficient oversight? States should certainly look well to the administration of such amounts. If a business to turn out pig iron, or cotton cloth, or oil, or cigars, can afford to call the best, though high-priced, business talent to its service, cannot afford in fact to pay men of lesser worth, can the public schools whose product is to be men and women do a lesser, smaller part? We must have the result in education of the enthusiasm, advice, force of our best men, and that expended right where it may count for most. We must look to our problem of supervision for undoubtedly we have not shown the wisdom of the business man with only dollars and not lives of boys and girls at stake. Supervision is not everything but as a large item it demands especial notice.

What Has Been Done?

But that does not mean that little has been done in school administration. Much has been accomplished. Practically every state has its state superintendent of schools or some officer answering thereto, and they form a splendid group. These officers, while concerned with the work of the state as a whole, see in the small community and rural region their greatest problem and opportunity. What they now are doing toward the betterment of conditions fills the whole outlook with promise. But what course is best seems nowhere to have been fully determined. Many excellent plans formu-

² Russell Sage Foundation. *A Comparative Study of Public School Systems.*

lated have not been carried out because of lack of financial support. Legislators must be educated to the need and convinced of the best course to pursue. But this is evident: state departments hope to accomplish most, only as they have supervisors of smaller units under their direction. In most states this has taken the form of county supervision, for the feeling prevails that a supervision close to the problems can best work out definite results. It is understood, of course, that, in several states, the county does not exist for school purposes, so special law provides instead. A majority of the states already have county supervision, in most of them the office being compulsory, as in Kansas, Missouri, Illinois; in others, as in Arkansas, it is optional with the county. Nevada is one state that has abolished the county superintendent and put out into the work five deputy state superintendents instead. Virginia has a system of district supervisors, sometimes with only one county, but often with more than one. Theirs is an effort generally to carry out supervision in particular lines and the plan seems to promise much. West Virginia has twenty-nine superintendents of magisterial districts in addition to county superintendents. Ohio has no county superintendents, but has legal provision, through local option, for district and township supervision. Massachusetts provides for supervision of townships or of groups of townships. Rhode Island, Maine, Vermont, have similar laws but in many cases they are not complied with. In 1910 it is said that forty per cent of the pupils were without supervision. Bills for providing assistant county superintendents were passed in 1911 for Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Oklahoma. Several other states already had some such provision. Oregon has a most significant law which provides that when a county has more than sixty school districts, the county superintendent shall appoint a county educational board which shall divide the county into supervision districts of twenty to fifty schools with a supervisor over each, he to act under the county superintendent. Other states with varying plans might be mentioned but the above is representative of what would be found.³ Boards of education of varying composition and diversity of powers act with local supervisors; in some cases advisory, in others subject to him, in yet others largely dominating his action.

³ In some cases no late report was received, but these serve to show average conditions.

Qualification, Election, Salary and Duties of County Superintendent

Qualifications of the county superintendent or corresponding officer vary greatly. In some states the law is quite specific and calls for large academic and professional preparation. In others there is practically no limitation as to choice. He is usually expected to be a resident of the region for which chosen. The plan of selection varies greatly. Election by popular vote in same manner as other county officers are chosen is the usual plan; appointment by those in higher supervisory positions is found; appointment by boards of education is not uncommon. In many places the office is largely a political one and thus the best man often fails of choice. The salary is generally inadequate. In 1907 the maximum in one of the best states of the Mississippi Valley was, with a single exception, \$900, and as low in some counties as \$400. Salary usually varies with the number of teachers supervised. In North Dakota assessed valuation is the basis. The new code of Pennsylvania fixes on \$1,500 to \$2,000 paid by the state, and the county may add to this amount. Some counties have an assistant at \$1,200. Some southern states run as low as \$450 plus \$150 for traveling expenses. New York pays \$2,000 by the state, and the county pays \$600 for clerk hire. In many states the salary will not continually command the best talent for the work. And yet excellent things have been done.

The usual work of the county superintendent covers most of the following mentioned lines: (1) Office work, which demands entirely too much of his time, at least half of it being usually spent clerically. (2) Certification of teachers and advice plus more or less authority regarding their employment. Certification plans vary widely, from full power in his hands, to mere oversight of writing on the questions sent out by state board and return of manuscript to them for grading. (3) Visitation of the teacher in her schoolroom work, giving encouragement and advice. (4) Holding of teachers' institutes, associations, reading circle meetings, etc. (5) Distributing state and county funds. (6) Making reports of conditions to those in authority above him. In many places, of course, these six lines are abridged as only part time is given to the work. The following enumerated list from responses by state superintendents to a questionnaire as to best things being done by county superintendents is representative of the special efforts put forth by those officers.

These are in addition, of course, to their regular work of visitation and general supervision. In the list we find the following as representative of best movements: Supervision for better agriculture, industrial education, boys' corn clubs, girls' domestic science, manual training, uniformity in use of course of study and promotion examinations, county graduation, establishment of standard one-room schools, good roads, special schools for older boys and girls, consolidation and rural high schools, heating and ventilation improvements, sanitation, play and games, school farms, medical inspection, improved local taxation, teachers' training in high schools, county agricultural high schools, supervision of agriculture and domestic science, plans against illiteracy, demonstration farms, lengthened school terms, annual county school-day exhibit, social betterment, supervision of special subjects, special assistant to county superintendent, cleaner school grounds, school gardening, cooperative purchase of school supplies, outdoor schools, poultry clubs, patrons' clubs, spelling contests, county field meets, libraries, pupils' reading circle work, primary supervision. These are certainly some active and worthy lines. North Carolina has had a system of county superintendents' meetings that seems to promise much. There were no addresses, but practical problems were worked out and uniform programs were agreed upon. At these meetings, state supervisors conducted work along their particular lines, *i. e.*, teachers' training, inspection of elementary education, high school work, agriculture, health. Three days of five hours each per meeting were given. County superintendents returned to work enthused with new ideas practically formulated. The idea is bound to grow. As mentioned, in some particular states, assistants to the state department in the person of special supervisors more or less numerous have lately been doing some excellent work. Some good work has been done thus in Kansas. Those in Arkansas under the direction of the state superintendent are among the most significant. Among these are a high school inspector, who goes into every county; a supervisor of elementary education who does a similar work for those schools; school improvement association organizer; special worker with the negroes in their educational problems.

Tendencies

A larger degree of centralization in maintenance as well as in control is everywhere in evidence. With county superintendents

the tendency is to increase required qualifications and to raise salaries, both tending toward greater efficiency. The unity of the problem is drawing it more and more away from local taxation toward increased state funds. Nevada pays for all supervision outside of cities. Pennsylvania pays her county superintendents everywhere. New England states contribute a part. In raising a fund for general school purposes, a proposed law of Massachusetts, which, however, failed of passage, while extreme, is yet indicative of the trend. It provided that all school funds be raised by a state tax to the exclusion of all local taxes. It undoubtedly points toward large changes in the near future. Local taxation, especially as to its distribution, is in most cases bad. We must have larger units that equity may prevail. Weak, though just as worthy and more needy, communities continually suffer for want of funds while their neighbors have more than sufficient for all school needs. State superintendents are more and more exercising their advisory and organization powers. Some states allow state and county superintendents to be chosen from outside the territory they are to supervise. Length of terms is left more unlimited. Certification is passing into the hands of the state.

The Need as it Appears To-day

What shall the educational future of the county or similar unit be? Two demands in a way seemingly at variance are most in evidence. The one consistent with the large unity of the whole plan of education demands that the state supervisor have all district and local supervisors under his control, and that plans largely emanate from his office. The other, growing out of purely local conditions and local pride, demands that the supervisor be one locally interested in the work, that he shall give himself to problems close to the individual school and the home. In most respects these two work out together, in the matter of initiation of reforms they may appear at variance but are not. The need calls for both and more. Let us examine what seems to be the need from the point of view of: I. Number, kind, and grade of supervisors. II. Relationship and dependence among supervisors, with conferences and plans. III. County superintendents and county boards of education. IV. Finance.

I. Number, Kind and Grade of Supervisors

(A) There should be a state superintendent acting with a state board, the two bearing about the same relation to one another and to the educational work of the state as is found in most of our commonwealths of to-day. Little reform as compared with other needs is here evident. The state superintendent's tenure of office should be greatly increased. He should be the best man obtainable, even though he be brought from outside the state as Governor Woodrow Wilson did in selecting New Jersey's Commissioner of Education. (B) Deputy state superintendents, two or more, sufficient to bring the central office more closely in touch continually with all parts of the state. The force of a strong state department needs to be felt more. (C) Supervisors of special subjects: High school inspector; inspector for elementary education; agricultural leader; school improvement organizer; worker with special classes. (These latter and those mentioned under (B) could in many states be the same individuals performing both duties.) (D) County superintendents. (E) District supervisors or visitors, one for each thirty to fifty schools acting as deputies for school visitation under the county superintendent. States having township rather than county units should have unions of a number of townships to equal usual county in extent, or, having township supervisors, deputy state superintendents might perform supervisory duties of county superintendent as one or the other plan best works out there. The Nevada plan of five deputies and no county superintendents or district visitors would hardly be sufficient for more densely populated regions. The Oregon plan of division within the county fulfills our ideas of closer visitation and supervision of the individual teachers.

II. Relationship Among Supervisors

Relation and dependence among these suggested officers are perhaps evident. The state superintendent would have as his advisory board and co-worker his deputies and supervisors of special subjects. These could best perform most duties of the state board as now constituted. In their frequent meetings, plans would be perfected, circulars issued, legislation planned. Special supervisors would go out to push their departments, deputies sufficient to reach all parts of the state once or twice a year at least would look after general interests among the county superintendents. Once during

the summer, and at other times as needful, they would hold conventions of county superintendents, perhaps by congressional districts. Here, as in the North Carolina plan before mentioned, enthusiasm and school spirit would be engendered, supervisors could well present their several special lines, practical plans be formulated. The county superintendent would go back to his work carrying something of value to his county. He with his deputies or district visitors would work out their ideas modified to meet local needs. This enthusiasm and these advanced ideas carried on to teachers would be felt immediately throughout the state. Schools would be bettered, not by mechanically formulated rules and plans, but by intelligently adapted ideas, ideas fitted to needs, and if no need then no action. But action taken would be united action. Especially would come united encouragement and enthusiasm. Deputy county superintendents (and township supervisors, where that plan prevails), should have only such number of teachers as they could well oversee, not so few as to invite to over-supervision. The committee of twelve of 1897 suggests that one could supervise from fifty to seventy-five teachers, but thirty to sixty would seem to be better under this plan.

III. *County Supervision*

Whatever plans may otherwise be, the county superintendent or similar officer is indispensable to a successful school system. States with county units have ideal opportunities. Most states are at least partially realizing this and providing for such officer. The qualifications should be high. They should be active school men, the best from the teaching force obtainable and if necessary to secure the best, county and state lines should serve as no barrier in their selection any more than it does in securing city superintendents. The likelihood of securing best men for the place seems to come through other than popular election. Under that system politics plays too large a part. Special commissions of Wisconsin and of Texas as well as other places have determined that the county superintendent should be chosen by the county board of education, and that seems the best plan. Georgia, North Carolina, Louisiana, Maryland so choose. Boards being chosen by the people stand responsible for their selection of county superintendent and when he proves unsatisfactory they need not wait until the end of his proverbial four years to make a change. This officer must be gotten

out of politics and such cannot be so long as popular election along with other officers is resorted to. When chosen, his tenure should be understood to be so long, and only so long as his work is satisfactory. Look at Kern of Illinois, or Miss Jessie Field of Page county, Iowa, and others for example. They should be given such territory (possibly more than one county in sparsely settled regions) as would occupy their full time. There should be no division of time with other occupation. With these safeguards more of real worth could be secured. The salary, as suggested elsewhere, should be such as would offer an inducement to enter that line and to remain actively engaged. We need not repeat the duties in detail here. Those elsewhere enumerated would practically all be within his line of action, his duties being mainly outside first and second class cities. His deputies would constitute his advisory board and with him might exercise many of the duties of a county board. We would suggest some changes and additional duties. Certification as found in many states should be mainly in the hands of the state board. Questions should come from that body; county superintendents oversee manuscript work; grading and certification be done by state; county superintendent to approve certificates for his county. He should make consolidation of weak schools an item of especial attention as a most important movement. Undoubtedly here is opportunity for a larger, fuller rural life. He should strive to build up his teaching force, and encouragement of normal training work in high schools is one of the most promising lines. For purposes of administration of specific schools, including organization, employment of teachers, etc., the township is better than the single school district as unit, and county as unit would be yet better. The success of Richmond county, Georgia, is an example. Undoubtedly we need to get away from the antiquated idea of single districts as units. In the selection of teachers the county superintendent should have larger advisory and stronger selective powers. The list of county superintendent's possible activities before mentioned, and which we need not repeat here, shows how great and far-reaching may be his influence over school and community life. No other officer approaches him in the possibilities of his work. County boards of education, elected by the people, should be carefully chosen and should stand ready to advance school interests generally.

IV. *Finance*

Reforms in our financial system as suggested are much needed. The tendency is more and more to draw on a state fund for large part of the need. The time has passed when this should be a local matter. A certain part, more than one-half, the needed funds should come from a state tax, and then local areas may supplement this amount as needed. The extreme position of the Massachusetts law before mentioned is, to say the least, not without its proper tendency. By all means should we have reform of our largely used system of financial distribution of moneys.

Some General Objections Answered

Two objections may at once arise. Is not such enlarged plan too expensive? Is there not so much machinery as to stifle the teachers' individuality? Neither of these objections is in the least valid. Statistics show that on an average less than two-thirds of our pupils of school age take advantage of school each day. Our outlay for plant, including cities, is more than one billion dollars, to say nothing of one-third that amount additional for maintenance each year. Compare the two-thirds efficiency with the vast investment and should we not, with the city, utilize the plant and maintenance more fully? Would business employ its capital at little more than sixty per cent of its capacity and be content? Would it not immediately call in overseers skilled to utilize that one-third that was being lost? No business to-day has better investment to offer than does supervision of schools hold before our people. Will not teachers' individuality be stifled? Not at all. Just as well say that railroads would be better run without organization; that Standard Oil owes nothing of success to its men in charge. Just as well might we do away with city supervision, and no one thinks of that. And we do not plead that the rural and small village child is so different unless such difference is to his advantage. It is not that he should have more but that he should have as much as his city cousin. Teachers would be a part of plans; supervisors would come in touch with them to advise, enthuse, stimulate. Where teachers are now so often uncertain as to what best to do, there would then be a confidence born of certainty. Before them would be brought and with them worked out plans along the various active lines before men-

tioned. Widened opportunities, lines of action based on real needs would give full chance for individual expression and expansion not now even thought of. Under just and full opportunity the rural boys and girls, in no way inferior material, will develop for society and the state large returns. Their education is a problem large. It must be solved, but solution is not alone for them but must be through them. Supervision discovers needs as they locally appear and suggests solutions. The child, aided by an aroused teaching force, encouraged by his parents, can then be trusted for results.